

THE PAST IS IN YOUR HANDS

Writing Local A.M.E. Church History



by Dennis C. Dickerson, Ph.D

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African Methodist Episcopal Church



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DEDICATION

TO

**Payne Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church
Duquesne, Pennsylvania**

“ . . . where I learned to love the Lord ”

TO

**Payne African Methodist Episcopal Church
Chatham, New York**

“ . . . where I learned to love the people ”

TO

**St. Mark African Methodist Episcopal Church
Munford, Tennessee**

“ . . . where I learned the meaning of faith ”

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FOREWORD

This pamphlet, *The Past Is In Your Hands: Writing Local A.M.E. Church History*, prepared by our Church Historiographer, should be a very valuable tool in our hands. Dr. Dennis C. Dickerson is to be commended for conceiving this useful document and we thank him for the skillful manner in which he has put it together. Now, all of the local A.M.E. Churches have at hand the guide they need to collect, preserve, and transmit the very important story their churches represent in the life of the denomination, the race and the nation.

The History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and the biographies of its heroes and heroines, capture the story and struggle of African Americans in America, in the Diaspora, and in Africa itself. In much the same way the story of our local churches and the personalities associated with them capture the story and struggles of a city, an area, and a conference.

Whatever contributes to making the information and story of local A.M.E. Churches easier to assemble its presentation full and more accurate is a major addition to the life of the Church and the Race. It is easy to commend this helpful pamphlet to the Church, and especially to the local A.M.E. Churches.

John Hurst Adams
Senior Bishop, A.M.E. Church
Atlanta, Georgia 30303
April 3, 1989

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes histories of African Methodist Episcopal congregations are hastily written to fill the pages of the church anniversary programs, annual conference souvenir books, and other special publications. A few brave parishes venture more systematic efforts to write serious commentaries on their pasts. While such histories contain valuable information and recount important events in the life of various congregations, they often lack focus and too frequently fail to use all of the scholarly resources available to discuss more fully the role and relevance of the local churches to the people, communities, and to the denomination to which they belong.

Writing a first-rate local church history adhering to high scholarly standards is within the reach of any conscientious A.M.E. This volume offers guidelines on the appropriate questions to pose, the types of library and archival resources available to researchers, and various methodological approaches that will yield important and crucial studies of local A.M.E. churches.

This publication is divided into three chapters namely the Rationale, the Research, and the Application. The chapter on the Rationale will raise appropriate questions that should be posed about the past of particular congregations like the reasons for the founding and the impact upon the communities of which they were a part. The following section on the Research indicates the type and location of various primary source materials. Finally, the reader will review in the section on the Application how the histories of two specific congregations about which little is known can become fuller accounts through the wise use of sources and consideration of the right questions about the seemingly sparse data that's been left behind.

Reconstructing the past of local A.M.E. churches is within the reach of any diligent researcher willing to devote time and thought to such a worthy venture. Those who employ these methodologies will gain a fuller appreciation of how the past can come alive for prophetic people wishing their churches "to serve the present age."

Chapter I

The Rationale

Effective exploration of the past of individual African Methodist Episcopal churches requires a serious historical focus. The pursuit of history challenges researchers to search for meaning, understanding, and causality in interpreting events, the origin of institutions, and why the behavior of people adhered to certain patterns. Many writers choose a random antiquarian approach which motivates them to present uncritically information, materials, and documents from the past without explanation or focus. In using this approach researchers simply unearth historical data with little inclusion of perspectives which aim toward an understanding and assessment of what they have discovered. For example, many congregational histories list names and length of service for various pastors of a church. The serious historian, however, does not stop there. He or she asks a broad range of questions of this important data. Who were these ministers in terms of their social and economic backgrounds? What particular preachers led these churches during times of upheaval like the Civil War, the Great Migration or the Civil Rights Movement and what kind of leadership did they provide? Did the background of pastors diverge from their congregations, and if so, did it make a difference in the effectiveness of their leadership? Historians pose questions about their findings. They know that the information does not speak for itself. Researchers must ask questions of the data in order to reach an understanding of its meaning and significance.

Likewise, when approaching the history of any congregation, researchers must start with a conceptual framework within which the past is to be examined, understood, and assessed. Especially, for congregations in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, three issues or themes must be addressed if the past of these local congregations becomes more than antiquarian explorations, but reach a plateau of historical significance.

Three issues of crucial importance must be addressed if a congregational history approaches a level of seriousness for members who wish to comprehend and benefit from the study. These matters concern the origin and development of individual A.M.E. churches. They include an exploration of the theological rationale articulated either in action or in a formal manifesto that speaks to the church's *raison d'être* (it's reason for being). The second issue concerns the specific historical circumstances or context which compelled the founders to establish the congregation. The third question deals with the quality of the congregation's prophetic witness considered over a sustained period of time. Let's explore these three issues in greater detail.

A. The Theological Rationale

James H. Cone, a professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York City and the best known theologian produced out of the A.M.E. experience, once remarked at a denominational meeting that theology is a systematic process of

communication between God and the individual which occurs on multiple levels. The scholar seeks to understand it in formal discourse and systematic study. At the same time ordinary people also do theology. In establishing churches, initiating missionary projects, extending church involvement to protest and various types of reform movements and other endeavors, Christians act on a particular understanding of what they think God wants them to do. Sometimes through revelation and at other times through an insightful reading of scriptures, people feel compelled by the Lord through the Holy Spirit to pursue certain actions which become concrete expressions of His work in their lives.

To organize a congregation is a serious initiative taken by persons who are in conversation with God and are motivated by Him to act in this manner. Some may dispute the authenticity of the relationship and doubt if the message from God was clearly understood by the recipient. What's important for the historian is what the founders of the congregation thought they were doing in response to the Lord's urgings. Whether we adjudge their actions sensible, rational or consistent with conventional theological dogma is not the historian's main concern. What is key is what was in the minds of these historical actors and what their actions say about their understanding of God and the gospel of His Son, Jesus Christ. Hence, any congregational history must grapple with the theology of the founders, however, informally expressed. Richard Allen, for example, wrote no formal theological manifesto when he invited Bishop Francis Asbury to dedicate Bethel Church in Philadelphia in 1794. Yet, the very act of establishing this congregation after blatantly racist treatment at St. George M.E. Church spoke to a clear theological understanding of the vision of God's church and whom it must serve. Bethel was an institutional expression of a fundamental theological truth. All people are creatures of God, and His Church was established by His Son, Jesus Christ, to serve all people. That crucial Christian principle required an institutional affirmation with the founding of Richard Allen's Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. That was the theological rationale for the formal establishment of the congregation and denomination which grew from it.

A similar search for the theological rationale which required the founding of other congregations must be pursued. The story must commence with an exposition of this fundamental and basic causality of a congregation's beginnings.

B. The Historical Context

The founding of each congregation must be located at a particular historical moment. Moreover, the surrounding and defining context must be a part of the explanation concerning the church's origin. The pervasiveness of racism, colonialism, and economic oppression have generally characterized the experience of A.M.E. adherents in both the United States and overseas. Hence, those phenomena usually have been the primary reasons to organize most A.M.E. congregations. Therefore, what was the state of race relations in the cities and towns where these churches were established? Did White con-

gregations either exclude or segregate them? Had there been racial conflicts in the locale? Were the congregations by-products of a migratory process in which persons needed a familiar religious anchor to give stability in a new racial environment? These and other questions become key when exploring the historical context in which A.M.E. churches were established..

In the 1810's and 1820's Rev. David Smith actively and productively spread African Methodism westward from eastern Pennsylvania to beyond the Alleghenies. This assignment drew him to various towns well populated with Blacks in the Pittsburgh vicinity. In two of those communities, Washington and Brownsville, Smith sojourned among Blacks for several weeks and discovered many of them worshipping in separate African galleries in Methodist Episcopal Churches. Upon alerting them to the existence of the A.M.E. Church, these Black Methodists beckoned Smith to seek permission from Bishop Richard Allen to bring them into this African Methodist denomination. Decades later thousands of miles across the Atlantic Ocean, Africans in what would become the Union of South Africa grew tired of discriminatory treatment from White Wesleyan Methodist missionaries. Like Richard Allen, James M. Dwane, who later consulted Bishop Henry M. Turner, led these dissidents to form the Ethiopian Church. Upon discovering that a similar movement a century earlier had yielded in the United States an independent African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Ethiopian congregation became African Methodists. Any account which explores the origins of the many congregations growing from these movements must discuss this historical context defined by militant racism practiced by Whites in both the Americas and Africa. Other congregations resulted from migratory movements in which Blacks sought to reconstitute familiar religious institutions in new surroundings. In Chicago, for example, when several new A.M.E. congregations were founded between 1916 and 1930, one might discuss how the general racial environment intensified by the unprecedented race riot of 1919 influenced Blacks toward an increased reliance upon their own separate institutions. Since Blacks moved from the South in huge numbers during this period, the racial setting in national, state, and local contexts must be a part of understanding why Blacks made particular religious and institutional choices which yielded A.M.E. congregations.

This exploration of the historical context is in no way divorced from the theological rationale discussed in the preceding section. The two modes of inquiry merge and become symbiotic. Blacks, especially African Methodists, drew on their understanding of God and His relationship with them to respond to their historical circumstances. Richard Allen asked the Holy Spirit's guidance in fashioning a response to the historical context of racial segregation and exclusion in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In less dramatic terms, many unnamed or forgotten founders of many A.M.E. congregations pursued the same process of developing a theological understanding and response to their historical context. Researching and rescuing that testimony is the major agenda item for the writer of a local church history.

C. The Prophetic Witness

A congregation's prophetic witness must be the focus of any narrative about its historical development. In what ways did both pastors and parishoners interpret and apply the theological rationale that brought the church into existence. How did the historical context out of which the congregation grew influence and shape patterns of involvement and leadership in issues and initiatives which affected the religious and secular condition of the communities it served. In short, how well did the congregation, beyond meeting its own institutional needs, minister to people who needed its protection, its advocacy, and its spiritual and material resources.

Accounts on church anniversary celebrations, the organization of special groups within the congregation's infrastructure, and the evolution of its fiscal condition, while important factors in a church's institutional development, do not necessarily speak to the quality of its prophetic witness. Such matters do testify to the strivings of Blacks, especially in the ante bellum period to establish institutional autonomy and develop racial solidarity. Moreover, strong institutional foundations also permitted congregations to look beyond themselves to the needs of others. It is that witness, however, that determines how true that congregation has been to the theological impetus and historical urgency that called it into being.

Though Bethel Church in Philadelphia was already a monument to Richard Allen and his Godly vision, it was Reverend Walter Proctor, one of Allen's pastoral successors who served as an agent on the Underground Railroad and like the bishop, involved the congregation in aiding escaping slaves. During the 1860's as the Civil War raged around Washington County, Maryland, Reverend Dennis Davis permitted the federal government to use the edifice of Ebenezer, Hagerstown as a Union hospital to assist soldiers fighting to end slavery. In the early 1900's Reverdy C. Ransom organized and pastored churches in Chicago and New York City with unprecedented social outreach to the jobless, homeless, and prostitutes. Decades later Brown Chapel in Selma, Alabama sheltered marchers as they moved to demonstrate for Black voting rights while Clayborn Temple in Memphis provided sanitation workers and their spokesman, Martin Luther King, Jr., with a platform to press their grievances. Also, Bethel Church in Cambridge, Maryland throughout the 1960's was headquarters for the local civil rights struggle.

Similar examples of many other congregations reaching beyond institutional priorities and committing resources to those who could not help themselves must compose the major content of any local church history. Their prophetic witness represents the fruition of a clearly understood theological rationale in which the founders, in conversation and meditation with God were called forth to establish a church. That witness is also consistent with the historical circumstances which provide the heritage from which to fashion a message and ministry appropriate to those whom the congregation was challenged to serve.

Chapter II

THE RESEARCH

I. Research in the United States

Diverse and fascinating historical sources are available to write the history of A.M.E. congregations. These sources fall into five major categories which include public documents, connectional and church records, manuscripts, oral history, newspapers and Town Histories. The writing of a serious and systematic account of a congregation's past requires the use of these materials.

Public Documents. Public documents comprise a rich and largely untapped source of congregational histories. They include such materials as deeds, records of property transfer, W.P.A. Church Archives Inventories, and census data. Generally, any documents dealing with population and real estate emanating from the many levels of government are likely to contain information bearing either directly or indirectly upon congregational matters.

Deeds of property, records of property sales and transfers, and acts of incorporation are often invaluable sources concerning the origins of congregations. These documents, if copies are not in the possession of the congregation, can also be located in municipal hall records or in offices of the county clerk. The name of the minister and trustees are usually on the sheet as well as the location of the property. Contemporary city or town maps will assist the researcher in finding where the church originally stood. Moreover, a city directory is often available in the municipal or county records office and in it the names of the minister and trustees can be found along with their economic and marital status and other pertinent facts.

Perhaps the best and least used source for congregational histories are a series of publications on churches and denominations from the Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce. The earliest volume, the *Report on Statistics of Churches in the United States* came out in 1894. In subsequent years, *Religious Bodies*, 1916, 1926, and 1936, were published in two volume sets respectively entitled, Summary and General or Detailed Tables, Volume I, and Separate Denominations, Volume II. These studies offer the most comprehensive statistical and fiscal information on local Black churches anywhere assembled.

For example, *Religious Bodies, 1916, Summary and General Tables, Volume I*, contains a section on cities with 25,000 inhabitants or more in the 1910 census. Listed under each city is a denominational breakdown of churches which includes membership totals, the number of male and female members, value of church properties, debt, expenditures, Sunday School data, and other information. Suppose the members of Payne Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado wished a congregational history. Then this census volume would be most helpful. Turning to pages 384 and 385 the researcher would find the following table on Colorado Springs, Colorado and

GENERAL TABLES.

IN 1910, 25,000 INHABITANTS OR MORE, BY DENOMINATIONS: 1916—Continued.

DENOMINATION.	Total num-ber of organi-zations.	DEBT ON CHURCH PROPERTY.		PARSONAGES.		EXPENDITURES FOR YEAR.		SUNDAY SCHOOLS CONDUCTED BY CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS.					
		Num-ber of organi-zations report-ing.	Amount of debt reported.	Num-ber of organi-zations report-ing.	Value of parsonages reported.	Num-ber of organi-zations report-ing.	Amount reported.	Num-ber of organi-zations report-ing.	Num-ber of Sunday schools reported.	Num-ber of officers and teachers.	Num-ber of scholars.		
COLORADO SPRINGS, COLO.—Continued.													
Congregational Churches.....	3	2	\$820	1	\$1,000	3	\$10,660	3	4	61	373		
Disciples of Christ.....	3	3	1,000			3	8,490	3	3	76	711		
Evangelical Association.....	1			1	2,800	1	1,527	1	1	19	187		
Jewish congregations.....	2					1	600						
Latter Day Saints:													
Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.....	1					1	155	1	1	7	30		
Lutheran bodies:													
General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America.....	1			1	2,000	1	1,880	1	1	15	101		
General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America.....	1					1	1,247	1	1	4	22		
Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of America.....	1			1	5,000	1	1,500	1	1	3	40		
Methodist bodies:													
Methodist Episcopal Church.....	5	4	6,325	3	6,100	5	19,434	5	5	168	2,138		
Methodist Episcopal Church, South.....	1			1	5,000	1	3,211	1	1	18	357		
Free Methodist Church of North America.....	2			2	1,100	2	1,294	2	2	17	85		
African Methodist Episcopal Church.....	1			1	4,500	1	2,434	1	1	13	125		
Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene.....	1			1	1,000	1	2,641	1	1	11	83		
Pentecostal bodies:													
Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.....	5	1	3,000			5	35,720	5	5	91	1,314		
United Presbyterian Church of North America.....	1			1	4,000	1	4,465	1	1	12	139		
Protestant Episcopal Church.....	3	1	250	2	16,500	3	18,161	3	3	31	281		
Roman Catholic Church.....	2	1	10,000	1	5,000	2	30,500	2	2	11	425		
Salvation Army.....	1					1	3,197	1	1	5	36		
Unitarians.....	1					1	1,900						
Universalists.....	1					1	200						
All other denominations.....	4	1	65			2	703	2	2	7	130		

RELIGIOUS BODIES.

TABLE 66.—STATISTICS OF RELIGIOUS BODIES IN EACH CITY HAVING,

DENOMINATION.	Total num-ber of or-gani-zations.	MEMBERS.				PLACES OF WORSHIP.			VALUE OF CHURCH PROPERTY.
		Num-ber of or-gani-zations report-ing.	Total number reported.	Sex.		Number of organizations reporting—	Num-ber of church edifices reported.	Num-ber of or-gani-zations reporting.	
				Male.	Female.				
COLORADO SPRINGS, COLO.—Continued.									
Congregational Churches.....	3	738	3	254	482	3	.....	3	\$71,500
Disciples of Christ.....	3	1,259	3	485	774	3	.....	3	28,000
Evangelical Association.....	1	128	1	50	78	1	.....	1	5,100
Jewish congregations.....	2	117	2	62	55	2	.....	2	6,500
Latter Day Saints:									
Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints...	1	160	1	65	95	1	.....	1	1,000
Lutheran bodies:									
General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America.....	1	127	1	54	73	1	.....	1	13,000
General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America.....	1	71	1	32	39	1	.....	1	5,600
Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of America....	1	133	1	33	100	1	.....	2	10,000
Methodist bodies:									
Methodist Episcopal Church.....	5	2,311	5	954	1,357	5	.....	5	123,750
Methodist Episcopal Church, South.....	1	338	1	124	214	1	.....	1	30,000
Free Methodist Church of North America.....	2	54	2	10	44	2	.....	2	4,000
African Methodist Episcopal Church.....	1	185	1	46	139	1	.....	1	8,000
Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene.....	1	61	1	24	37	1	.....	1	1,600
Presbyterian bodies:									
Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.....	5	2,095	3	568	1,527	3	.....	3	122,000
United Presbyterian Church of North America.....	1	218	1	85	133	1	.....	1	10,000
Protestant Episcopal Church.....	3	683	3	202	421	3	.....	3	86,500
Roman Catholic Church.....	2	2,100	2	920	1,180	2	.....	2	65,000
Salvation Army.....	1	63	1	32	36	.....	.....	.....	.....
Unitarians.....	1	135	1	63	72	1	.....	1	15,000
Universalists.....	1	51	1	20	31	.....	.....	.....	.....
All other denominations.....	4	116	3	35	52	2	1	2	3,150

the denominational breakdown of churches. One discovers that the A.M.E. congregation in Colorado Springs in 1916 included a membership of 185 and they worshipped in an edifice worth \$8,000 with no indebtedness on the property. Payne Chapel possessed a parsonage worth \$4500. With a Sunday School of 125 scholars and annual church expenditures of \$2434, the researcher is able to discuss in detail the statistical and fiscal condition of an A.M.E. congregation during the 1910's. A follow up to the 1916 data can be pursued by consulting the relevant volumes of *Religious Bodies*, 1926 and 1936 to discover how the congregation had fared over the subsequent two decades.

Researchers interested in such disparate congregations as Bethel, Altoona, Pennsylvania or Young's Chapel, Huntington, West Virginia will find the same information on these historic parishes. *Religious Bodies*, 1916, for example, reveals that the Altoona church and the Huntington congregation had respective memberships of 106 and 110. Like the Colorado Springs church, other statistical and fiscal information is provided. Many other A.M.E. congregations can be found in the volume with this valuable data for a local church history. Any government documents section of a local public or college or university library has the *Religious Bodies* volumes.

In some instances, individual states conducted their own censuses. Both Massachusetts and New York during the 19th and early 20th centuries did an internal census. New York devoted a special section, specifically for the decennial years of 1855 and 1865, to churches. The category, "African Methodist Episcopal Churches," refer to the A.M.E. and A.M.E. Zion congregations under the county and city headings. Annual conference minutes identify churches in one denomination or the other. When that determination is made, the congregational information includes membership, seating capacity and monetary worth of the edifice and other relevant data.

The entry on the following page from the 1855 New York State Census includes data on A.M.E. congregations in such places as Albany, Coxsackie, Flushing, and Huntington.

During the 1930's the federal government established the Works Progress Administration (W.P.A.) generally to provide employment to the jobless. Included were artists, musicians and writers. Those in the latter group, for example, interviewed 2,000 elderly ex-slaves and built a collection of testimonies about Black bondage that remains a crucial source for studies of the "peculiar institution." W.P.A. writers also undertook in numerous communities across the country the Church Archives Inventory project. The project produced information about the origins and major developments of countless congregations that the writers surveyed. These data were deposited in various state historical societies and local libraries throughout the nation. The collection at the Ohio Historical Society, the Archives-Library Division in Columbus, Ohio is called the Historical Records Survey Church Inventory. Several A.M.E. congregations in Ohio are surveyed with information on the founding date,

TOWNS.	Number of churches.	Value of church and lot.	Value of other real estate.	Number capable of being seated.	Usual number attending.	Number of communicants.	Salary of clergy, including use of real estate.
AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCHES.							
ALBANY Co.							
Albany,	1	3, 000	.....	500	200	.....	500
CATUGA Co.							
Auburn,	1	1, 600	.....	200	58	8	250
CHEMUNG Co.							
Elmira,	1	2, 000	.....	400	200	80	250
DUTCHESS Co.							
Fishkill,	1	500	.....	150	50	30	.....
GREENE Co.							
Coxsackie,	1	1, 000	.....	275	150	60	.....
HERKIMER Co.							
Little Falls,	1	450	.....	60	30	8	.....
KINGS Co.							
Brooklyn,	2	14, 000	1, 000	3, 700	900	298	850
MONROE Co.							
Rochester,	2	2, 800	150	400	45	10	250
NEW-YORK Co.							
New-York,	6	120, 000	8, 400	4, 530	3, 005	1, 668	2, 150
ONEIDA Co.							
Rome,	1	1, 000	.....	250	50	9	200
OSWEGO Co.							
Oswego,	1	900	.....	200	30	16	400
QUEENS Co.							
Flushing,	1	3, 000	.....	900	300	75	400
Hempstead,	1	150	25	100	40	.....	.....
North Hempstead, ..	1	400	30	100	40	30	25
Total,	3	3, 550	55	1, 100	380	105	425
RENSSELAER Co.							
Lansingburgh,	1	600	.....	150	120	34	200
Troy,	1	1, 200	.....	250	100	50	250
Total,	2	1, 800	.....	400	220	84	450
RICHMOND Co.							
Westfield,	1	1, 000	.....	300	50	.....	.....
SCHENECTADY Co.							
Schenectady,	1	800	.....	150	50	.....	.....
SUFFOLK Co.							
Brookhaven,	2	700	.....	225	75	59	50
East Hampton,	1	\$1, 000	.....	200	60	35	.....
Huntington,	1	600	.....	300	200	38	\$50
Islip,	2	420	.....	180	70	18	30
Total,	6	2, 720	.....	905	405	150	130
WESTCHESTER Co.							
Rye,	1	1, 000	.....	150	50	20	100
Westchester,	1	600	.....	100	25	23	134
Total,	2	1, 600	.....	250	75	43	234

(Census of the State of New York for 1855, Albany, Charles VanBenthurysen, 1857, p. 461)

various buildings the congregation occupied, and the first pastor. At the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul, Minnesota the W.P.A. church project includes information on St. Peter A.M.E. Church in Minneapolis and St. James A.M.E. Church in St. Paul. The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania has a similarly rich W.P.A. church collection which designates "Negro" churches by county and by specific denomination. The large number of A.M.E. churches extending across the Philadelphia, Delaware, and Pittsburgh Conferences make this source an especially useful one for researchers working on various congregational histories. The Tennessee collection is called the *Directory of Churches, Missions and Religious Institutions of Tennessee*, (The Tennessee Historical Records Survey Project, Works Progress Administration, 1940). Four volumes covering Shelby County, Davidson County, Knox County, and Hamilton County can be found at Burrow Library at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee. These counties respectively include listings of A.M.E. churches, founding dates, and other information for the cities of Memphis, Nashville, Knoxville and Chattanooga. These Ohio, Minnesota, Pennsylvania and Tennessee repositories are only four of many archives and libraries which contain these W.P.A. church records for specific states and locales.

Connectional and Local Church Documents

Perhaps the best and most available source for local A.M.E. church histories is the *A.M.E. Christian Recorder*. From the time it commenced publication in 1854 until the present, the newspaper has included a wide variety of articles on numerous aspects of congregational developments and activities. Whether notices appeared on the founding of congregations or whether columns were printed on local church involvements and contributions to particular communities, the histories of congregations from the 19th through the 20th centuries can be found easily in the *A.M.E. Christian Recorder*.

Microfilm editions are located at Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church in Philadelphia, at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey, at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, and at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. Those wishing access to contemporary editions may inquire at the Tennessee Historical Library in Nashville, Tennessee. Moreover, the current Editor of the *A.M.E. Christian Recorder*, the Reverend Robert H. Reid, Jr., also of Nashville, has compiled a complete set of the newspaper from 1976 to the present in his personal library. Similarly, the present Historiographer has various copies of the *Southern Christian Recorder for the 1940's*.

Annual conference minutes are another fascinating and crucial source for writing A.M.E. congregations. Though varying in content, minutes provide pivotal information about spiritual and temporal conditions in various local churches. Like the *Religious Bodies* volumes of the Bureau of the Census, annual conference minutes include statistical information on membership and fiscal data on expenditures on various connectional and local projects. Minutes

which range from the New England Annual Conference proceedings of the 1860's to those of the Virginia Annual Conference of the 1910's report comments on the state of the congregations within these respective jurisdictions. For example, a researcher writing about Mt. Zion Church in Newport, Rhode Island would find in the 1861 New England Annual Conference minutes that "Rev. G.A. Rue reported very favorably for Newport station, both spiritually and temporally, the church being completed and now ready for dedication." (*Minutes of the New England Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in America, held in Bethel Church, Meeting Street, Providence, R.I., From June 13th to June 20th, 1861, New Bedford, Evening Standard Steam Printing House, 1861, p.5*). Similarly, the local researcher writing the history of Allen Chapel Church, Staunton, Virginia, for example, would find the following in the 1916 Virginia Annual Conference minutes:

Staunton Station, Rev. Jno G. Ross, B.D., pastor — He has served this charge five years, and has succeeded in paying off that debt, which for so long has been a set back to the progress of the Church. The people were discouraged, but Rev. Ross, by his untiring efforts has brought new life to them. We need a new building here in order to keep abreast with the progress of the Historic City, located in the fertile picturesque valley of Virginia. The people are anxious to build and should be encouraged every way possible. Rev. Ross, is a loving and earnest worker for the Master, and is greatly helped by his wife, who takes an active part in the work of the Church. There is a S.S., A.C.E. League and Missionary Society here.

(*Journal of Proceedings of the Fiftieth Annual Session of the Virginia Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church Held in (Third Street) Bethel A.M.E. Church, Richmond, Va., Wednesday, April 5-9, 1916, Nashville, A.M.E. Sunday School Union, 1916, p.77*).

Furthermore, annual conference minutes speak to the different origins of churches and the particular circumstances of their establishment. In some instances annual conferences founded churches and sustained them in their early years. When the denomination established the New England Annual Conference in 1852, five congregations existed including one in Portland, Maine. That recently established church seemed too weak to survive. Hence, at the urging of local members, the development of the church became a conference matter. The minutes observed that "a communication was here presented to the notice of the Conference, stating the present condition of the Church at Portland, stating if a man possessing the qualifications of a christian minister was sent there, the Society would be revived and established at once." Toward that end it was resolved "that this Conference concentrate its energies for the relief, and permanent establishment of the Portland City Church." (*Minutes of the New England Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Held in the City of New Bedford, Mass. from June 10 to the 21st, 1852, New Bedford, Press of Benjamin Lindsey, 1852, pp. 11, 13*).

In other instances, however, lay persons in local communities took the initiative to establish congregations. The necessity of annual conference approval and acceptance drew such matters into the minutes where they were printed and provided a record of various ways that congregations came into being. These petitions in the 1933 New York Annual Conference minutes illustrate the point. One came from the upstate New York community of Glasco.

Glasco, New York, May 12, 1933, A.D.

To the Bishop and members of the New York Annual Conference of the First Episcopal District, of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

We, the Colored people of Glasco desire to connect with the above named Church and Conference and pledge you our loyalty and obedience to the Discipline of the Church, if we are accepted by this Conference.

Signed,
I.H. CARVIN, Secretary
EDWARD NEAL
GARNIE GUNN
L.H. DAVIS
JOHN WATTERSON

Stewards

AMES BURNETT
GEORGE LEWIS
LAWRENCE CODY

Trustees

C. BERESFORD BARROW,

Pastor

The other petition came from Harlem in New York City:

St. Philip A.M.E. Church, 226 W. 124th St., New York City, April 14, 1933 To the Bishop and members of the New York Annual Conference, now in session.

We the members of St. Philip Mission, with the membership of 14.

We do hereby make an application to the New York Annual Conference, applying for membership. And if we are accepted, we are willing to be ruled and governed by the rules and regulations of the A.M.E. Church.

Your in Christ,

Sister E. Woodly	
A. Freeman	\$1.00
O. Gadsden	
Julia Richardson	1.00
Elizabeth Jenkins	1.00
Lucilia Givens	1.00
Rebecca Freeman	1.00
Henry Washington	
Emma Oliver	1.00

(Journal of Proceedings, New York Annual Conference, Bethel Church, 52-60 West 132nd Street, New York, N.Y., May 25-28, 1933, p.25).

Many libraries, archives, and churches have copies of various annual conference minutes. Some copies of the Baltimore Annual Conference and Missouri Annual Conference minutes, for example, can be found in the respective libraries of Bethel A.M.E. Church, Baltimore, Maryland and St. Paul A.M.E. Church, St. Louis, Missouri. The State Historical Society of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri has the minutes of the Missouri

Annual Conference for the years 1893 and 1904. The Society also has the minutes of the North Missouri Annual Conference for the years 1883, 1884, 1886, 1892, 1893, 1896 - 1900, 1902 - 1908, and 1914. The New Bedford Free Public Library in New Bedford, Massachusetts has New England Annual Conference minutes for the years 1852, 1854, 1858, 1859, 1860, 1861, 1866, and 1868. The Library Company of Philadelphia and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania also in the City of Brotherly Love hold numerous 19th century annual conference minutes. The Library Company has the following:

Minutes of the Third Annual Conference of the New England District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in America, Held in Bethel Church, Providence. From June 16 to 25, 1855. (Providence: Knowles, Anthony & Co. Printers, 1855).

Minutes of the Fourth Annual Conference of the New England District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in America, Held in Plymouth Hall, Boston, From June 21 to 30, 1856. (Providence: Knowles, Anthony & Co. Printers, 1856).

Minutes Of The Fifty-Third Session Of The Baltimore Annual Conference Of The African Methodist Episcopal Church Held On April April 20, 1870 At Hagerstown, Maryland. Rev. Bishop A.W. Wayman, Presiding. Baltimore: F.A. Hanzsche's Steam Printing House, 1870.

Journal Of Proceedings Of The Third Annual Conference Of The African M.E. Church, For The District of Missouri. Held at Louisville, Ky., September 5, 1857. (wrapper title) Louisville Rev. John M. Brown, Secretary, 1857.

Minutes Of The Ohio Annual Conference Of The African Methodist E. Church. (cap. title) [Columbus?: 1850.]

Minutes Of The Ohio Annual Conference Of The African M.E. Church Held In Cincinnati, Ohio, From August 6, To The 18, 1852. A.R. Green, Publisher. Pittsburgh: "Christian Herald", 1852.

Minutes Of The Thirty-Second Session Of The Ohio Annual Conference Of The African M.E. Church, Held In Zanesville City, Ohio, From April 15 To 23, 1862. Zanesville: Daily Courier Office, 1862.

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania which is next door to the Library Company has minutes for the New York and Pittsburgh Annual Conferences.

Minutes Of The Fifty-First Session Of The New York Annual Conference Of The African Methodist Episcopal Church, Held In The Sullivan Street Church, New York City, May 17-23, 1871. Brooklyn: Published By Rev. W.F.Dickerson And Rev. W.H.W. Winder, 1871.

Minutes Of The First Pittsburgh Annual Conference Of The African Methodist Episcopal Church, Held At Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania . . . 1869. Pittsburgh: W.S. Haven & Co., 1869.

Minutes of the Second Pittsburgh Annual Conference . . . 1870. Pittsburgh: W.S. Haven & Co., 1870.

Minutes of the Third Pittsburgh Annual Conference . . . 1871. Pittsburgh: W.S. Haven & Co., 1871.

Researchers should note that these annual conference minutes are useful beyond the state or city named in the jurisdictional title. The 1857 Missouri Annual Conference, for example, embraced congregations in Louisville, Kentucky; St. Louis, Missouri; New Orleans, Louisiana; Alton, Illinois and other points.

Various copies of the minutes of the Ohio Annual Conference and the North Ohio Annual Conference are located in the *Benjamin Arnett Collection* at the Library of Wilberforce University in Ohio. The 1871 minutes of the Ohio Annual Conference can be found at the Ohio Historical Society in Columbus, Ohio. The South Caroliniana Library of the University of South Carolina in Columbia has South Carolina annual conference minutes for 1874 and 1876. Similarly, the Duke University Library in Durham, North Carolina has copies of the North Carolina Annual Conference minutes of the 1870's. The Special Negro and African Collection in the Langston Hughes Memorial Library at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania has the *Combined Minutes of the Third Episcopal District* for several years during the 1950's. These minutes include the Ohio, North Ohio, South Ohio, Pittsburgh, and West Virginia Annual Conferences. Lincoln University also has some combined minutes for the 1960's from the First Episcopal District which includes the Philadelphia, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, New England, and Bermuda Annual Conferences. Researchers should check their local public, college, and university libraries, state, county, and local historical society archives, and congregation libraries for copies of annual conference minutes. They yield valuable information for local church history. Additionally, those interested in Kansas congregations may contact Reverend Leslie White, pastor of St. James A.M.E. Church in St. Louis, Missouri. He had the minutes of the Kansas Annual Conference from September 1908 to September 1929.

Though General Conference minutes deal mainly with connectional concerns, valuable information can be sometimes gleaned which focus on specific local church matters. In the 1864 General Conference minutes Reverend Thomas M.D. Ward, later a bishop, reported on his missionary labors in the Pacific Coast area. He noted the founding of congregations at several locations and proudly observed that "all our churches are paid for." Ward listed the churches and their respective worth:

Church at San Francisco	worth \$14,000
" Sacramento	worth 3,000
" Stockton	worth 3,500
" Marysville	worth 1,500
" Grass Valley and Nevada	worth 2,100
" Virginia City, N.T.	worth 1,300
" Oakland	worth 1,400
" Petulama	worth 1,200
" Placerville and Coloma	worth 1,600

(Thirteenth General Conference of the African M.E. Church held in Philadelphia, PA, May 2, 1864, Philadelphia, William S. Young, Printer, 1864, pp.44-45)

In the 1920 General Conference minutes the Church Extension Department report noted that between 1916 and 1920 various congregations received appropriations to upgrade their physical facilities. A sample of such contributions is listed below:

Special Appropriations to Churches — 1916-20.

Second District — Bethel, Baltimore	\$11000.00
Sixth District — St. Philips, Savannah, Ga.	2100.00
Fifth District — Grant Memorial, Wichita, Kans	200.00
Cain Chapel, Kansas City, Mo	100.00
Sixth District — St. Philips, Savannah, Ga	2100.00
Turner Tabernacle, Macon, Ga	1350.00
A.M.E. Church, Moultrie, Ga	50.00
A.M.E. Church, North Albany, Ga	75.00
A.M.E. Church, East Dawson, Ga	75.00

(*Journal of the Twenty-Sixth Quadrennial Session of the General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church Held in St. Louis, Missouri, May 3rd to 18th, 1920, Nashville, A.M.E. Sunday School Union, 1922, p. 293.*) Many General Conference minutes are located in the Archives at the Financial Department Building at 1134 Eleventh Street, NW in Washington, D.C.

Manuscript Collections

Researchers should check manuscript collections at various libraries and archives. Manuscript collections refer to the Papers either of individuals or institutions which include letters, diaries, reports, addresses, sermons, newspaper clippings, and church souvenir-anniversary journals.

The Tennessee State Library and Archives in Nashville, Tennessee contains the *C. H. Boone Papers*. An A.M.E. minister in the Thirteenth Episcopal District, Charles H. Boone served as presiding elder of the Nashville District from 1924-1930 and the South Nashville District in the Tennessee Annual Conference from 1930-31 and from 1936 until his death. Hence, information about several congregations he pastored and supervised in the Nashville area can be gotten from the collection.

At the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul, Minnesota, manuscript material exists on St. James A.M.E. Church in St. Paul and St. Mark A.M.E. Church in Duluth, Minnesota. The *Eva Neal and Family Papers* has material about St. James Church. For the period 1893 to 1975 the historical society has one microfilm roll on St. Mark, Duluth. Included are trustee and steward record books, various printed programs, Sunday School records, correspondence, and a sketch of St. Mark's historical development.

The Moorland-Springarn Research Center at Howard University has in its Manuscript Division extensive information on the history of Metropolitan A.M.E. Church in the District of Columbia. The repository has church records for the period 1825 to 1972 which contain minutes of the official board, fiscal records and various data on pastors. Additionally, the *Simms Family Papers* has information on the early development of Metropolitan, and Union Bethel A.M.E. Church, the original congregation from which Metropolitan came. Also the *Cromwell Family Papers* contains material on the history of the denomination's "national cathedral."

Those interested in the fascinating story of Ebenezer A.M.E. Church in Hagerstown, Maryland should go to the local Washington County Historical Society which has the congregation records for the period 1856 to 1904. Additionally, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and the Ohio Historical Society in Columbus, Ohio respectively have information and commemorative anniversary journals on St. Paul A.M.E. Church in McKeesport, Pennsylvania and Allen Temple A.M.E. Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. The Western Pennsylvania Historical Society in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania has similar materials on Bethel A.M.E. Church, the oldest Black congregation in the Smoky City. Researchers interested in the history of Bethel A.M.E. Church in Buffalo, New York should visit the city's North Jefferson Branch Library and Center for Local Afro-American History and Research which has three (3) microfilm reels containing various church records for the period from the 1920's through the 1960's.

The list of repositories discussed above is meant to be suggestive, rather than exhaustive. Diligent researchers should always check at local libraries, state archives, and other repositories for manuscript materials on A.M.E. congregations. These institutions have become custodians of these materials in multiple ways including donation, solicitation, and fortuitous discovery. The important matter to note is that public and private libraries and archives are often surprising and unexpected sources for local church history. It's always worth the effort to inquire whether such materials exist within their manuscript collections.

Many pastors and parishoners of foresight and diligence have made steps to establish archives on their church premises. For example, Emanuel A.M.E. Church in Portsmouth, Virginia and Ebenezer A.M.E. Church in Baltimore, Maryland, founded respectively in 1772 and 1836, have the original minutes of early board meetings for the ante bellum period.

Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church in Philadelphia and Bethel A.M.E. Church in Baltimore have incredibly thorough and extensive local church archives. Mother Bethel in its well maintained Historical Museum has documents dating from the time of Richard Allen's pastorate to the present. Corporation and board minutes, correspondence, and a variety of other materials make Mother Bethel an unusually fruitful location for local church history research. Since Mother Bethel also has a complete run of the *A.M.E. Christian Recorder*, reseachers who wish to research other congregations would find a visit to the church a wise use of time and effort.

The records of Bethel Church, Baltimore are another rich source of information. Diverse documents from the 19th and 20th centuries are housed at the church. They include, for example, a membership roll for 1825-1853, 1907-1909, 1918-1932, and 1961. Minutes of Bethel's official board and trustee board for the 1800's and several periods in the 1900's are extant. A particularly

fascinating feature of the collection are the *Minutes for Organization of Poor Relief Association*. Those interested in a historical record of marriages and baptisms will not be disappointed. This enumeration is only a sample of what's included in this rich collection. Moreover, the Bethel Church records have been placed on eight (8) reels of microfilm and can be examined at the Maryland Hall of Records in Annapolis, Maryland. Other congregations are strongly encouraged to follow the lead of Mother Bethel, Philadelphia, Bethel and Ebenezer, Baltimore, Emanuel, Portsmouth, Virginia and several others which have systematically established and presently maintain archives for their congregational records.

Oral History

Frequently, written sources are either sparse or unavailable to researchers of local church history. Oral interviews thus become a valuable substitute for traditional documents or an important supplement to government data, annual conference minutes, manuscripts, and other materials.

Some libraries and archives systematically have commissioned oral interviews with grassroots community persons who were particularly active in various social institutions, especially churches. From these oral sources emerge much on the evolution and activities of Black churches. The Minnesota Historical Society, for example, has collected interviews with members of St. Mark A.M.E. Church in Duluth, Minnesota. Researchers have access to the transcripts of interviews with Carrie L. Dozier (1892-) the oldest member of the congregation who came to Duluth in 1921 from her native Maryland. Another interview with Charles M. Stallings (1927-), treasurer of the Steward Board of St. Mark, is equally informative about the congregation's history. A third interview with Reverend Alphonse Reff (1942-), an alumnus of Southern University and the Moody Bible Institute, also sketches St. Mark's importance in Duluth, Minnesota. Other repositories like the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania have developed their own oral interviews of grassroots Blacks who played pivotal roles in A.M.E. churches throughout the state. Researchers should check at the state archives, local historical societies, and public libraries on whether such oral history projects have been completed that include testimonies on various A.M.E. congregations.

In most instances, however, researchers will need to identify and interview on their own knowledgeable church members. It is especially advisable to put on tape the recollections of older church members. Questions about the origin or early development of the church, social and economic profiles of members and their geographical background, pivotal pastors, the role of women, and congregational involvement in important secular issues should shape the inquiries. Though formal and direct interrogatories on theological matters might be either elusive or intimidating, subtle, but specific questions about the core beliefs, understandings about scripture, the role of music, and various

liturgical practices will help to draw an informative theological framework that these members experienced and affirmed in their congregational lives.

Newspapers and Town Histories

Black newspapers are an available and copious source for local church history. Such leading Black newspapers as the *Chicago Defender*, the *New York Age*, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Richmond Planet*, the *Baltimore Afro-American*, the *Atlanta Daily World*, the *St. Louis Argus*, and many others carried articles on the A.M.E. congregations in those cities. Moreover, in the satellite communities surrounding these metropolitan centers, news items were sent in concerning A.M.E. Church activity. One random example will suffice. In the *New York Age*, August 20, 1938 on page 10 is important information under the heading "Brooklyn-Long Island Churches on Bethel, Far Rockaway, Allen Jamaica, and St. Mark, Corona." In the same edition on page 12 under "Albany, N.Y." and "Tuckahoe, New York" are columns concerning the activities of Israel A.M.E. Church and Emanuel A.M.E. Church respectively. Such sections of Black newspapers yield much data on various congregations.

Most college, university, and public libraries have on microfilm particular Black newspapers. Frequently, they can be gotten through your local library on interlibrary loan. Access to the newspapers is usually easy.

Local town or city newspapers should be never overlooked. Though white owned and often times racially prejudiced, these newspapers usually approached Black religious happenings with some neutrality. Rare are the local public libraries that do not have copies on microfilm of the local newspaper. Nearby colleges and universities can be counted on in many cases to preserve such valuable sources. For example, the Archives of Industrial Society at Hillman Library at the University of Pittsburgh has an entire run of the *Duquesne Times* from the early 1900's to 1960. In its pages is rich information on the development of Payne Chapel A.M.E. Church in Duquesne, Pennsylvania. Other institutions will prove equally abundant in newspaper sources containing much local Black congregational history.

An often overlooked and underused source are town histories. These volumes which normally populate the shelves of local libraries sketch the development of local communities and frequently include churches. In most instances Black churches are listed and crucial information about their founding and early development are included. Researches exploring local A.M.E. congregations should always check town histories for the valuable information that they can yield.

II. Research Overseas

At least 1/6 of all African Methodist Episcopal congregations are located outside of the United States. In fact, the Church of Allen stretches across four continents to include congregations in about 30 countries. Hence, this handbook

for writing local church history also speaks to over 1,000 churches overseas which, like their counterparts in the United States, deserve encouragement toward producing effective and useful accounts of their congregational developments.

Perhaps the best repositories within the respective countries where A.M.E. Churches are located are official government national and provincial archives. The Botswana National Archives in Gaborone and National Archives of Zimbabwe in Harare, for example, will likely have various material concerning A.M.E. congregations operating in these nations. Also in Zimbabwe is the Makokoba A.M.E. Church Archives in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

Walton R. Johnson, the author of *Worship and Freedom: A Black American Church in Zambia* (New York, Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1977), in writing about the A.M.E. Church in that central African nation uncovered numerous crucial sources of congregational development. They came mainly from the Lusaka, Zambia Archives in the captial city. They include the following:

ACC 90/31 — African Methodist Episcopal Church — Nacula Site.

IN 1/2 — Alien Natives.

SEC/NAT 286 — African Methodist Episcopal Church.

ACC 90/28 — African Methodist Episcopal Church — Site at Nachula.

ACC 90/29 — African Methodist Episcopal Church — Revs. Marumo and Nojekwa.

IN 1/7 — Ethiopian Church in Northwestern Rhodesia.

KDB 6/3/3/3 — Kalomo: Tour Reports, 1936-40.

ZA 7/2/5/7 — Annexures to Annual Reports XVI-XIX, 1931.

ZA 7/2/6/5 — Annexures to Annual Reports XIV-XV, 1932.

KSN 3/1/4 — Ndola S.D. — Annual Report, 1932.

SEC/Misc 73 — Information Regarding Circulation of Subversive Literature.

SESC/NAT 306 — Native Christian Conference.

N/0001/2/15/4/conf — Disturbances in Chinsali District, 1955.

AZ 1/9/1/1 — African Methodist Episcopal Church.

B 1/2/327 — Separatist Native Sects in Southern Africa.

KDE 1/5/2 — Outletters: Letter Book for Secretary for Native Affairs, April 1905 to March 1907.

SEC/NAT 66D — 1955 Annual Report, Abercorn.

Additionally, Johnson found at A.M.E. Church headquarters, the minutes of the annual conferences which embraced Zambia. (Zambia was once called Northern Rhodesia).

Minutes 1953 Northern Rhodesia Annual Conference.

Minutes 1955 Northern Rhodesia Annual Conference.

Minutes 1958 Northern Rhodesia Annual Conference.

Minutes 1958 Southern Rhodesia Annual Conference.

Minutes 1962 Zambia Annual Conference.

In South Africa where the A.M.E. Church claims about 700 congregations, numerous government repositories hold information about congregations in that country. For example, such provincial libraries as the Transvaal Archives Depot and the Cape Archives Depot especially their respective *Native Affairs Department Papers* refer often to the A.M.E. Church.

Some educational institutions have recognized the importance of A.M.E. Church history in South Africa and have initiated efforts to preserve it. For example, the *Easter M. Gordon Papers* are housed at the University of the Western Cape, Institute for Historical Research in Bellville. Reverend Gordon was long a leading minister among A.M.E.'s in South Africa and a supporter of the many congregations in his Episcopal district.

The *Henry M. Turner Papers* at the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University in Washington, D.C. and the *Levi J. Coppin Papers* at the Library of Wilberforce University in Ohio contain valuable information on South Africa derived from the involvement of these two bishops.

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library in New York City acquired in 1988 (*New York Times*, November 23, 1988) some records of the A.M.E. Home and Foreign Mission Department. In that rich collection are accounts of A.M.E. mission activity throughout Africa, the Caribbean, and South America. For example, a careful record of the establishment of the A.M.E. Church in Cuba in 1939 can be gleaned from this important set of records. Other A.M.E. Home and Foreign Mission Department documents are housed at the office of the Secretary of Missions, Reverend Frederick C. Harrison, also in New York City. There researchers may study the *Voice of Missions*, which yields valuable documentation of the development of A.M.E. congregations in the overseas districts.

Various reports of the Home and Foreign Mission Department and Women's missionary organizations demonstrate just how rich the documentation can be on churches outside of the United States. Mrs. Milburn Brown of Owings Mills, Maryland, the daughter of Bishop Monroe H. Davis and granddaughter of Bishop W.W. Beckett, shared with the current Historiographer, reports that illustrate the point. At the 1940 General Conference, Rev. L.L. Berry, Secretary of Missions, offered his report on A.M.E. missions. (The Thirty-first Quadrennial Report of the Home and Foreign Missionary Department of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1936-1940, pp. 19-20). Those researchers interested in writing the history of A.M.E. congregations in the West Indies would find Berry's statistical profile of individual churches quite useful toward writing a sound account of Caribbean congregations. See the following:

**STATISTICS ON THE CHURCHES AND SCHOOLS OF THE A.M.E. CHURCH
IN
SOUTH AMERICA AND THE WEST INDIES**

	Church Members	Sunday School	A.C.E. League	Missry. Society
Virgin Islands:				
Fredericksted, St. Croix	250	85	27	30
St. Thomas	6	...	...	...
	Church Members	Sunday School	A.C.E. League	Missry. Society
Christiansted — Bethel	188	63	18	17
Fredericksted — Mission	27	14	...	...
Barbados:				
Collymore Rock	118	70	18	25
Bell Gully	25	21	...	...
Trinidad:				
Metropolitan — Port of Spain	120	72	77	81
Fountain	15	10	24	17
St. Joseph's	21	12	...	15
Bethesda and Chase Valley Circuit	42	50	...	18
British Guiana:				
SMith's — Vergemoegen	38	45	41	30
Turner Monumental — Wakenaam	50	35	65	25
Ebenezer — Georgetown	37	45	...	20
St. Peter's — Georgetown	105	75	45	72
Dutch Guiana:				
Bethel — Paramaribo	55	89	...	66
Shiloh — Nickerie	69	150	58	6
Haiti:				
St. Paul — Port-au-Prince	68	32	40	25
Christine S. Smith Mission	40	45	...	...
Dominican Republic:				
Samana	275	256	36	...
San Pedro de Macoris Zion	77	44	22	16
Greene Chapel, La Romana	22	18	12	10
San Pedro de Macoris, Ebenezer	56	40	...	8
Ciudad Trujillo, Bethel	10	...	...	...
Jamaica:				
Calvary	94	88	24	36
Mt. May	82	52	...	...
Grace and St. Paul Circuit	94	65	...	30
Gaines, Plants and Red Grove Circuit	115	97	...	43
Refuge and New Bethel Circuit	86	42	...	26
Kingston — Allen Temple	52	65	25	12
Ebenezer Breast Works and Coppers Hill Circuit	50	100	18	40
St. John's, May Pen P.O.	44	114	35	17
Morant Bay and Church Corners	75	35	...	...
Spring Garden and Mt. Stewart	75	60	...	...
Zion Hill and St. Joseph's	50	80	...	...
TOTALS	2531	2067	595	783

Whether the congregation was Metropolitan in Port of Spain, Trinidad or St. Paul, Port au Prince, Haiti, the membership data as well as the extent of Sunday School, A.C.E. League, and Missionary Society participation, point to important information crucial to

writing about the historical development of individual churches in the Caribbean area.

Similarly, in Clara E. Harris' 1935 *History of the Women's Parent Mite Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1824-1827 — 1874-1935*, researchers can learn much about congregational histories in Africa. In 1907 in Sierra Leone, H.M. Steady, the Presiding Elder and Superintendent, wrote about each church within his jurisdiction. For example, on a mission church in Sierra Leone's capitol city, he wrote:

Campbell Memorial Mission, in the farthest end of the City Freetown. This Mission was organized to perpetuate the Memory of our Missionary Bishop Jabaz Pitt Campbell, eight years ago. Elder Garber the pastor, has done excellent work and is building a separate place to worship of modern architecture: he has succeeded to put an iron roof on, but was compelled to stop for want of funds to complete. He is in need of \$500.00 to pay the debt incurred and to finish. Congregation in this locality is encouraging and the signs are hopeful.

Concerning another nearby church, Steady asserted the following:

Emmanuel A.M.E. Church about half a mile from New Zion. The change made at this point in the last Conference is opportune, our interest here in the hands of Rev. Newland had run down. I have been compelled to take over the charge and with the assistance of a lay agent, new life has been restored — members and friends who had left and gone have nearly all returned. The sign is hopeful.

(Harris, pp. 128-129).

Researchers may check the collection at the Schomburg, the office of the missions secretary or the memorabilia preserved by individual A.M.E.'s to investigate these largely untapped sources for congregational histories for A.M.E.'s outside of the United States.

What has been discussed on research for histories of A.M.E. congregations is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive. In many cases those who do the histories of their local churches will uncover documents and repositories never before exploited by previous researchers. This sampling of sources is meant to prod researchers to delve deeply into local libraries, historical society holdings, state archives, and other institutions to creatively use them to uncover important information on the history of A.M.E. congregations.

Chapter III

THE APPLICATION

Earlier in this research guide the Historiographer discussed a rationale on which to build a thematically coherent congregational history. Also presented was an extensive survey of the types of documents and location of various library and archival repositories. This final section offers a brief historical examination of two A.M.E. congregations which predate the Civil War and how the suggestions on the rationale and research apply to the practical work of writing a local church history.

Often only sparse information about A.M.E. congregations has survived for researchers to piece together their church histories. That is certainly the case of two congregations which flew the banner of African Methodism from the 1850's into the 20th century. Kinderhook, New York and Lee, Massachusetts respectively boasted a single Black congregation, and in each instance they belonged to the A.M.E. connection. Although only scattered data remain on these small, (and now defunct) congregations, the Historiographer, using town histories, annual conference minutes, federal and state census reports, and oral testimonies, will demonstrate how a thematically cogent history based on these fragmentary primary sources can yield an informative account of the Kinderhook and Lee churches.

The scarce materials on Bethel A.M.E. Church in Kinderhook, New York allow us to reconstruct the following modest, but meaningful narrative of its historical development. The account will blend the crucial themes outlined in the first chapter of this pamphlet and the particular facts peculiar to the evolution of this New York congregation. Let this sample historical sketch of the Kinderhook church serve as a guide for other local church historians.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BETHEL A.M.E. CHURCH, KINDERHOOK, NEW YORK

While we know little about the origins of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Kinderhook, New York, records are clear about the arrival of African Methodism in the upper Hudson River area around Albany. Reverend William Cornish, whom Bishop Richard Allen dispatched to upstate New York in 1828, established in that same year an A.M.E. congregation in Albany.¹ The presence of a growing A.M.E. Church 20 miles away in the state's capital city and the recent founding of another A.M.E. congregation in nearby Chatham probably influenced the small group of Blacks in Kinderhook to affiliate with this Black Wesleyan organization.

Since a White Methodist Episcopal Church was already operating in Kinderhook, it is safe to infer that local Blacks were either uncomfortable or unwelcome in that parish. Hence the theological rationale that drove Richard Allen to launch the A.M.E. denomination in Philadelphia several decades earlier, remained relevant for Blacks



Bethel A.M.E. Church, Kinderhook, New York in around 1900



Members of Bethel A.M.E. Church, Kinderhook, New York in the late 1930's

in Kinderhook. Like Allen, they wished to affirm that God was no respecter of person and He took no cognizance of color as a criterion for salvation.

Because they were Black, the vast majority of those who in 1851 started Bethel and subsequently sustained it were poor people. We know that because the New York state census tells us that in 1855 that 158 out of 163 Blacks in the town had means too modest to require taxation. Moreover, that condition remained the same even ten years later when in 1865 126 out of the 133 Kinderhook Blacks were not taxed. Clearly, these early A.M.E.'s were persons without property or prosperous occupations.² Hence, their determination to found a separate Black Church with so few worldly goods is all the more remarkable.

Although they remained without an edifice from 1851 until 1858, the members finally purchased a lot for \$125 in the latter year. By 1865 the congregation had erected a church with a seating capacity of 300 and it was valued at \$1000. They also paid an annual pastoral salary of \$200. Though the Kinderhook congregation in 1858 had a membership of 37, 60 persons usually attended services.³

Despite its century long existence, Bethel remained a small congregation. In 1934, for example, 80 years after its founding, the membership stood at 18! Reverend I.S.A. Cooper, nonetheless, had worked hard during the preceding year and included within that modest 18 two conversions and four accessions. Building on that effort, his successor, Reverend W.L. Kindred, drew another convert and accession in 1936, and reported to the 1937 New York Annual Conference a total membership of 41. These increases, however, occurred within a congregation whose membership seldom exceeded 50.⁴

It was difficult for small churches to raise funds for purposes beyond such institutional needs and obligations as pastoral salaries, connectional claims, and other denominational assessments. Nonetheless, Bethel, Kinderhook contributed to many projects which affirmed a commitment to the larger mission of African Methodism. Despite the Great Depression, for example, Bethel in the 1930's supported various benevolences, the national distribution of Bibles, and to the training of preachers at Payne Theological Seminary in Ohio.⁵

Though mostly served by itinerant elders in the New York Annual Conference, local elders and lay leaders occasionally preached from the Bethel Church pulpit. As membership declined Kinderhook shared a pastor with Payne A.M.E. Church in Chatham, New York. In 1953, for example, Reverend E.W. Thompson, ministered to both congregations. In 1958, Bethel disbanded and the property sold. The congregation, a part of the denomination for over 100 years, had been shaped by a vision and witness that Richard Allen employed to create and define a new Wesleyan organization.⁶

¹ *150th Anniversary Souvenir Program*, Israel A.M.E. Church, Albany, New York, June 11-23, 1978.

² Edward A. Collier, *A History of Old Kinderhook*, (New York, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1914), p. 282.
Census of New York, 1855, (Albany, Charles Van Benthuyssen 1857), p. 3; *Census of New York, 1865*, p. 4.

- ³ Collier, p. 282; *Census of New York, 1865*, p. 552.
- ⁴ *Official Journal of the New York Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Minutes of the One Hundred and Twelfth Session Held at Macedonia A.M.E. Church, Flushing, New York, May 24-27, 1934*, p. 118; *Official Journal of the New York Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church Being Minutes of the One Hundred and Fifteenth Session, May 19-23, 1937 Held in Israel A.M.E. Church, Albany, New York*, p. 43.
- ⁵ New York Annual Conference, *Minutes*, 1934, pp. 115-116.
- ⁶ Collier, p. 282; *Official Minutes of 131st Annual Session of the New York Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church Held at Greater St. Luke's A.M.E. Church, New York, N.Y., June 3-7, 1953*, p. 3; Interview, Robert and Gertrude Van Ness of Chatham Center, New York, May 28, 1989.

Similar sources also allow the researcher to reconstruct the early history of a long forgotten congregation in western Massachusetts in the Town of Lee. In existence mainly during the second half of the 19th century, the Lee Church, though now extinct, was among the early congregations brought into the newly established New England Annual Conference.

THE GENESIS AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE A.M.E. CHURCH IN LEE, MASSACHUSETTS

Wherever Blacks joined Whites in worship, the racial attitudes of the latter nearly always compelled the founding of Black churches. Apparently, ante bellum Lee, Massachusetts was no exception. In the early 1840's Blacks worshipped in local churches and several became well known as unusually pious Christians. Although Blacks seemed integrated into the town's religious life, they responded readily to opportunities to worship apart from Whites. Whether White actions prompted these moves or whether Blacks felt uneasy among them is unclear. What's indisputable is that Blacks in Lee, despite the appearance of integration, believed they needed their own church. Hence in 1844, when a White evangelist arrived to preach among them, Blacks in Lee used that occasion to respond to the minister's suggestion to start a church. ¹

In 1852 at the other end of the state in New Bedford, Massachusetts ministers and members of the first session of the New England Annual Conference resolved to form the Pittsfield Mission, an area to embrace seven Berkshire County communities including Lee. In 1854 Reverend George Stanford, a transfer from the Philadelphia Annual

Conference, received the appointment to evangelize in western Massachusetts. Stanford focused his energies upon Lee and reported 37 members and 20 Sunday School scholars to the 1855 New England Annual Conference.² Apparently, Stanford drew to African Methodism a group of Blacks ready to affiliate with a denomination whose theological credo spoke to their racial experiences and human aspirations. What Stanford, once a Philadelphia Conference preacher, must surely have told them about Richard Allen's St. George encounters struck responsive chords among Blacks in this small New England town.

Over the next several years the bishops who assigned pastors to Lee still considered it a mission appointment even though an edifice had been built in 1852. In 1856, for example, Lee was a part of the Springfield Circuit, and in 1858 it was attached to Great Barrington. In 1859 Lee reported 23 members while its Great Barrington component had 17.³

During the 1860's, however, the Lee congregation, while maintaining spiritual zeal, encountered various fiscal difficulties. In 1861, William H. Chase, the traveling preacher assigned to the members, "reported unfavorably for the temporal condition of the church . . . being some \$400 indebted; but he said the spiritual condition was favorable there being several conversions during the year."⁴ In 1862 that mixed assessment remained the same. In 1866 at the New England Annual Conference in New Bedford "several letters from Lee were read which show that the church is involved in a law suit, and requested the conference to assist them". Other New England churches were urged to raise funds to send to the aggrieved Lee parish.⁵

The Lee church consisted of poor people. Often White missionary groups in the area helped the congregation pay its preachers. Nonetheless, by 1890, the parish, still with a small membership of 23, managed to maintain an edifice with a seating capacity of 275 valued at \$1000.⁶ Moreover, the poverty of Lee A.M.E.'s did not prevent their participation in various missionary efforts beyond their scenic and serene surroundings in western New England. Hence, in 1859 Lee members donated to the conference fund for missions, and in 1866 they gave to assist widows and orphans.⁷

Nevertheless, the future was not bright for the Lee church. Although 144 Blacks lived in the town in 1880, only 51 remained by 1915.⁸ Though the church eventually closed, the Lee congregation served as yet another example of Blacks affirming the rightness of Richard Allen's call to form a church where neither race nor social condition determined the worth of one's soul.

¹ C.M. Hyde and Alexander Hyde, *Centennial History of the Town of Lee, Mass.*, (Springfield, Clark W. Bryan & Company, 1878), p. 244.

² *Minutes of the New England Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church Held in the City of New Bedford, Mass. From June 10-21, 1852* (New Bedford, Benjamin Lindsey Press, 1852), p. 11; *Minutes of the New England Annual Conference, 1854*, pp. 6-7; *Minutes of the New England Annual Conference, 1855*, pp. 5, 13.

- ³ Hyde & Hyde, p. 244; *Minutes of the Fourth Annual Conference of the New England District*, 1856, p. 14; *Minutes of the Sixth Annual Conference of the New England District*, 1858, p. 7; *Minutes of the New England Annual Conference*, 1859, p. 8.
- ⁴ *Minutes of the New England Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in America Held in Bethel Church, Meeting Street, Providence, R.I., From June 13-20, 1861*, (New Bedford, Evening Standard Steam Printing House, 1861), pp. 2, 5.
- ⁵ *Minutes of the New England Annual Conference*, 1862, p. 12; *Minutes of the New England Annual Conference*, 1866, p. 7.
- ⁶ Hyde & Hyde, p. 244; U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of the Census, *Report of Statistics of Churches in the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890*, p. 554.
- ⁷ *Minutes of the New England Annual Conference*, 1859, p. 19; *Minutes of the New England Annual Conference*, 1866, p. 7.
- ⁸ *Census of Massachusetts*, 1915, *Census of Massachusetts*, p. 227.

These brief, sample presentations on the Kinderhook, New York and Lee, Massachusetts churches illustrate how the important themes discussed in this pamphlet and the primary sources available in various repositories enable serious researchers to write sound local church histories. The pamphlet puts the exploration of the A.M.E. congregational past within the reach of anyone wishing to understand and write about this fascinating aspect of our denominational history.

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